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Laos: Politics, Economics, and Society; Laos: A Bibliography

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Pitsuwan makes an exceptional contribution toward understanding the traditional *pondok*, or religious school (*madrasa*), in the Malay areas of southern Thailand. Drawing on the Southeast Asian ethnography of such scholars as Clifford Geertz, he develops an evolutionary history of the *pondok* as it emerged from indigenous *guru* elements of the pre-Islamic period. Pitsuwan views the *pondok* as a parallel to the Buddhist *wat* in providing the basic socialization of individuals within the wider society in Thailand.

In southern Thailand the *pondok* became the preeminent symbol of Malay Muslim Islamic ideals and cultural resistance to Buddhist authorities in the north. The *pondok*, like the *wat*, reinforced ethnic differences through rituals that affected individuals throughout their lives. In the process these enculturation rituals created problems for Thai Buddhist legitimacy. Because the Thai authorities correctly viewed the *pondok* as the key institution in transmitting Malay religious and political ideology in the south, their aim was to transform this institution into a secular instrument and cultivate "Thai" values for political purposes.

The final substantive chapter deals with recent ideological and religious-political developments among the Malay Muslims in the south from 1973 to 1982. Pitsuwan describes the major separatist movements operating within the Greater Patani region at present. He also sheds light on the new Islamic fundamentalist movements among these Malay Muslims, who want to return to genuine Islamic principles to strengthen the moral and religious fiber of their communities in order to survive in a Thai Buddhist state. Islamic fundamentalist values will provide a religious justification for the violence carried out by them against the Thai authorities.

Pitsuwan could have added more historical depth, and he might have included global processes affecting Islamic regions throughout the world. If Pitsuwan had used a broader context, recent Thai government policies would have to be considered in light of regional and extraregional developments. The emphasis on socioeconomic development is directed not only at the southern Thai Muslims but also at the north-eastern Thais and central Thais as well as southern Thais, whether Muslim or Buddhist.

Pitsuwan has made a fine contribution and done meticulous research in Asian sources not directly available to other scholars, interpreting them in a highly original manner. Analyzing the underlying patterns of Thai government policies and Malay Muslim resistance to them, the book breaks substantive ground in comprehending the issues between the Malay Muslims in South Thailand and Bangkok authorities with an underlying conceptual unity that makes it a valuable monograph. These issues now remain to be considered in a more global framework.

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Laos: Politics, Economics, and Society. By MARTIN STUART-FOX. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986. xxiv, 220 pp. \$30.00.

Laos: A Bibliography. By WILLIAM W. SAGE and JUDITH A. N. HENCHY. Library Bulletin 16. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986. xvi, 235 pp.

Stuart-Fox's useful survey contains chapters on the political history, social structure, political and economic systems, and domestic and foreign policies of Laos. As

a work of synthesis it in part summarizes previously published information. But it also contains significant new data based on the author's five-week visit to Laos during July–August 1985. Although he encountered government resistance to initiating some contacts, he conducted ten interviews with ministers and other high officials. The author makes detailed and appropriate references to the extraordinary dearth of even basic facts, as well as the lack of Lao newspapers and magazines that might be expected to carry political information. Given this apparent lack of available publications, it would have been helpful to learn more about the writer's travels in Laos to provide more context for judging some of the information in the book, especially relating to economic development. Although the author does extensively cite interviews and sources published outside Laos, the origin of some comments is unclear.

These methodological points aside, Stuart-Fox has ably used the scholarly resources available to a Westerner. He emphasizes that Laos is a small and vulnerable multiethnic entity sandwiched between larger states with more uniform populations. Although the Communist government of Laos firmly controls power and internal resistance does not now appear to be a problem, Stuart-Fox's remarks about the relative independence of provincial authorities are significant, particularly Luang Prabang, where tribal minority cadres have assumed an important role.

Laos's close political, military, economic, and social dependence on Vietnam is encyclopedically documented. The Lao government has sided strongly with Vietnam in its conflict with China. But the author notes that the Communist leadership among the dominant ethnic Lao now supports the Buddhist clergy and the observance of religious ritual. Although this policy developed after the political power of the priests had been neutralized, the conscious preservation of Buddhist activities clearly shows continuing strong feelings of national identity. Such feelings, we are told, have also been manifested in border disputes with the Vietnamese.

With the fall of South Vietnam and the coming to power of the Communist Pathet Lao, the regional role of the United States has been assumed by the Soviet Union, which has become the major supplier of technical assistance. The massive sequential presence of personnel from these two countries emphasizes Laos's continuing technological dependence on foreign assistance.

There is also a successful economic carry-over from the American presence: the growing role of Laos as a supplier of hydroelectric power (the country's leading export) from the Nam Ngum dam to Thailand. Even though political relations since 1975 between these culturally close neighbors have frequently been tense, they continue to be linked in a joint power network. Much of their conflict arose because about 10 percent of the Lao population (300,000 people) fled across the Mekong to Thailand during 1975–85. A significant proportion of that group have been Hmong mountain people who were the main constituent of the CIA-supported Secret Army. Stuart-Fox believes that despite the Lao government's failure to socialize agriculture and despite the massive outflow of population, the political elite has shown flexibility in adapting to altered conditions. It is noteworthy that Stuart-Fox makes his valuable contribution from Australia, a new source of scholarship on Laos. This seems to reflect Australia's greater role in Southeast Asian affairs.

Sage and Henchy's useful bibliography, current as of 1975, has about 2,500 references including many reports and memoranda of governments and international agencies not normally available in libraries. This volume provides a perspective on the state of Western scholarship concerning Laos. Among political scientists, in addition to Stuart-Fox with two dozen citations, two American scholars, MacAllister Brown and Joseph Zasloff, have been similarly prolific. Another important writer is the Indian journalist Nayan Chanda. The other group of researchers well represented

in the bibliography is the social scientists. Perhaps the most interesting, as well as the most prolific with more than fifty items, is the American physician Joseph Westermeyer who during his time with the American Aid Mission learned both Hmong and Lao. His book, monographs, and articles on psychiatric illnesses and opium addiction in Laos represent a significant contribution. The works of French ethnologists and cultural historians such as Charles Archaimbault, Georges Condominas, Amphay Dore, Pierre Bernard LaFont, and Jacques Lemoine are also noted, as are the contributions of American historians who have specialized in Thailand such as John Murdoch and David Wyatt, as well as the anthropologist Charles Keyes. Although there are a number of travel books and personal accounts, there is an overall lack of substantive monographic studies. These two volumes are key for understanding and researching contemporary Laos.

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Agricultural Development of a Tropical Delta: A Study of the Chao Phraya Delta.

By YOSHIKAZU TAKAYA. Translated by PETER HAWKES. Monographs of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987. xviii, 269 pp. \$30.00 (cloth); \$22.00 (paper).

This volume summarizes the results of Takaya's extensive research on agricultural land use in the Chao Phraya River delta in Thailand. It presents detailed descriptions of the twelve distinctive "rice-cultural regions" Takaya identifies as the principal agricultural landscapes in the delta. These regions display great diversity in soils, water regimes, cultivation practices, and living conditions. The book also describes the delta's physical geography and its transformation by human activity. Takaya provides a history of land development since the Ayutthaya period and a reconstruction of the cultural history of the three major rice-planting techniques. The origin of broadcast sowing is attributed to India, transplanting into a plowed field to northern Thailand, and transplanting into unplowed swamp fields to the Malay world.

The delta's transformation from wilderness to densely settled human habitat is Takaya's central theme. He presents convincing evidence that the Chao Phraya delta as it exists today is essentially a human artifact. Even the seemingly natural vegetation in many areas is anthropogenic. Until the 1860s, the delta was a seasonally flooded grassland and swamp forest. This "amphibious environment," as the author aptly terms it, was an almost uninhabited wilderness. Water was the key limiting factor for human settlement: in the rainy season there was no dry land on which to live; in the dry season there was no drinking water to support people and livestock. Constructing canals solved both problems. They brought in a steady freshwater supply and provided elevated house sites along the banks. The canals also provided an efficient transportation system; military and trade considerations rather than the needs of agricultural development largely determined their routes.

Irrigation was not at first a major concern, although the delta is a water-deficient area for rice cultivation. Only in this century did the construction of irrigation facilities become a priority. The Greater Chao Phraya Project, completed in 1957, remodeled the water regime of much of the region, changing rice-cultivation techniques.